

Message Text

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PAGE 01 BEIRUT 14292 171710Z

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ACTION NEA-10

INFO OCT-01 EUR-12 IO-10 ISO-00 NEAE-00 SSO-00 INRE-00

AS-01 NSCE-00 SAM-01 SAB-01 SAJ-01 OPR-02 SY-05 OC-05

CCO-00 OMB-01 AID-05 PER-01 SCS-03 SCA-01 A-01 SCCT-01

ACDA-05 COME-00 EB-07 FRB-03 INR-07 NSAE-00 TRSE-00

XMB-02 OPIC-03 SP-02 CIEP-01 LAB-04 SIL-01 USIE-00

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FM AMEMBASSY BEIRUT

TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 7313

INFO AMEMBASSY AMMAN PRIORITY

AMEMBASSY ATHENS PRIORITY

USINT BAGHDAD

AMEMBASSY CAIRO PRIORITY

AMEMBASSY DAMASCUS PRIORITY

AMCONSUL JERUSALEM PRIORITY

AMEMBASSY JIDDA PRIORITY

AMEMBASSY KUWAIT PRIORITY

AMEMBASSY LONDON

AMEMBASSY MOSCOW

AMEMBASSY PARIS

AMCONSUL STUTTGART

AMEMBASSY TEHRAN

AMEMBASSY TEL AVIV PRIORITY

USMISSION USUN NY IMMEDIATE

USCINCEUR VAIHINGEN GER

CINCUSNAVEUR LONDON UK

COMMSIXTHFLT

CTF SIX ZERO

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CTF SIX TWO

CTG SIX ZERO PT TWO

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PAGE 02 BEIRUT 14292 171710Z

FICEURLANT NORFOLK VA

DIA WASHDC
CIA WASHDC

C O N F I D E N T I A L BEIRUT 14292

E.O. 11652: N/A
TAGS: PINT, PINS, LE
SUBJ: ANOTHER BLUE MONDAY IN BEIRUT

REF: BEIRUT 14191 (13 NOV 1975 1450Z)

1. SUMMARY: AFTER SPORADIC VIOLENCE OVER WEEKEND, SECURITY SITUATION APPEARS TO HAVE SETTLED DOWN FOR THE MOMENT TO LEVEL OF INCIDENTS JUST SUFFICIENT TO KEEP RESIDENTS ON EDGE AND LARGELY INACTIVE. MAIN THRUST OF LAST FEW DAYS HAS BEEN IN POLITICAL ARENA WHERE THERE HAVE BEEN SOME PROMISING MOTIONS BUT, AS YET, NO SUBSTANTIAL SIGN OF LINEAR PROGRESS TOWARD COMPOSITION OF CONFLICTING VIEWS. CABINET IN SPECIAL MEETINGS ON SATURDAY AND MONDAY CONSIDERED POLITICAL AND ECONOMIC REFORMS. END SUMMARY.

2. RAINY WEEKEND APPEARS TO HAVE DAMPENED SPIRITS AT LEAST OF LOCAL TROUBLEMAKERS. INTERNAL SECURITY FORCES REPORT MORNING NOV 17 THAT COUNTRY REASONABLY QUIET WITH EXCEPTION OF HADATH, LAILAKI AND KFAR SHIMA. ALTHOUGH EXCHANGES OF FIRE (SINN AL FIL, NABA', RAS AN NABA) WERE REPORTED SUNDAY, NOV 16, A MERE FOUR PERSONS ARE KNOWN TO HAVE BEEN ABDUCTED AND A NUMBER, PREVIOUSLY KIDNAPPED, HAVE BEEN RETURNED. NEVER-THELESS, COMBINATION OF DAMPNESS AND RESIDUAL ANXIETY COLORING OUTLOOK OF LOCAL RESIDENTS. MANY OF THOSE WHO HAD VENTURED OUT THIS MORNING WERE SENT SCURRYING AT ABOUT 1100 HOURS AS RESULT OF APPARENTLY UNTARGETTED GUNFIRE IN SODECO AND PLACE DES CANONS.

E. POLITICAL MOTION, LEADING NO ONE IS PREPARED TO PREDICT WHERE, DOMINATED ATTENTION OF OBSERVERS OVER LAST SEVERAL DAYS. MAIN FOCUS WAS CABINET SESSION, NOV 15, ATTENDED BY PRES FRANGIE, AFTER WHICH PRIMIN KARAME ANNOUNCED CABINET AGREEMENT THAT HE AND PRES EXPLORE IMPLEMENTATION OF POLITICAL, ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL REFORMS AGREED BY COUNCIL OF CONFIDENTIAL

CONFIDENTIAL

PAGE 03 BEIRUT 14292 171710Z

MINISTERS IN BROAD OUTLINES. KARAME OUTLINED HIS VIEWS ONLY ONE DAY AFTER POLITICAL REFORM SUBCOMMITTEE, CHAIRED BY FORMER PRIMIN ABDULLAH YAFI, RECOMMENDED, IN ABSENCE OF PHALANGE AND CHAMOUNIST REPS, WIDE-RANGING CONSTITUTIONAL AMENDMENTS, INCLUDING ABOLITION OF ARTICLE 95 ENSHRINING CONCEPT OF CONFESIONAL DISTRIBUTION OF GOVT POSTS. THESE DECISIONS EVOKED A STRONGLY NEGATIVE REACTION FROM CHRISTIAN ELEMENTS, INCLUDE THE PHALANGE LEADERSHIP.

4. KARAME APPEARS TO BE GROPING FOR A MIDDLE COURSE, WHICH WILL SATISFY THE MAIN ELEMENTS ON BOTH SIDES OF THE REFORM ISSUE--THE CHRISTIANS WITH THEIR BELIEF IN THE SANCTITY OF THE CONSTITUTION, ON THE ONE HAND, AND THE BULK OF THE MUSLIMS AND SINCERE REFORMERS ON THE OTHER. HE CHOSE, THEREFORE, TO COUCH HIS REMARKS IN TERMS OF "INTERPRETATION" OF CONSTITUTIONAL PROVISIONS RATHER THAN AMENDMENT. IN SELECTING THIS ROUTE, HE HAS MOLLIFIED SOME OF THE CHRISTIAN ALARM AT THE PROPOSALS OF THE YAFI COMMITTEE AND SIMULTANEOUSLY SEIZED UPON ONE OF THE TRADITIONAL JURISPRUDENTIAL BASES OF ISLAMIC LAW (I.E., AL IJTIHAD). DECONFESSIONALIZATION IS A TWO-EDGED SWORD EVEN ON THE MUSLIM SIDE AS A RECENT PROCLAMATION FROM THE MUSLIMS OF THE AKKAR, PROTESTING ANY TAMPERING WITH THE SHARIA' COURTS (MUSLIM RELIGIOUS COURTS WITH JURISDICTION OVER PERSONAL STATUS CASES), DEMONSTRATED.

5. IF KARAME HOPED TO SOLIDIFY BOTH THE CHRISTIAN AND MUSLIM CENTERS BY HIS ACTION, HE MUST HAVE BEEN AWARE THAT HIS ACTION WOULD ALSO AROUSE BOTH EXTREMIST FRINGES. THE EXTREME RIGHT-WING CHRISTIANS (E.G., THE MARONITE MONKS, THE GUARDIANS OF THE CEDARS) CANNOT BE EXPECTED TO COUNTENANCE ANY ALTERATION OF THE "STATUS QUO" REGARDLESS OF THE GUISE IT ASSUMES. THE EXTREME LEFT IS EQUALLY UNHAPPY WITH A TURN OF EVENTS WHICH THREATENS TO DEPRIVE THEM OF THE ONE POLITICAL FORUM IN WHICH THEY HAD ACHIEVED A POWERFUL PRESENCE--THE DIALOGUE COMMITTEE AND ITS THREE SUBCOMMITTEES (BEIRUT 11966). WITH THE PHALANGE AND CHAMOUNISTS BOTH BACKING AWAY FROM THE DIALOGUE COMMITTEE FORMAT, THE LEFT CORRECTLY PERCEIVES THAT THIS PARTICULAR PIECE OF MACHINERY MAY LOSE ITS CENTRAL ROLE AND RELEVANCY AND THE "PROGRESSIVE" PRESS (MUHARRIR" AND "SAFIR", IN PARTICULAR) REACT STRONGLY TO WHAT THEY CONSIDER KARAME'S BACKSLIDING.

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PAGE 04 BEIRUT 14292 171710Z

6. AS THE POLITICAL ASPECT OF THE CURRENT CRISIS IS SORTED OUT, AND ESPECIALLY IF KARAME APPEARS TO BE MAKING REAL HEADWAY IN ASSEMBLING "MODERATE" FORCES IN THE COUNTRY IN A MEANINGFUL EFFORT TO FORGE A NEW CONSENSUS, LUNATIC FRINGES AT BOTH EXTREMES OF THE POLITICAL SPECTRUM WILL BE SORELY TEMPTED TO SEEK TO SABOTAGE THE PROCESS BY STOKING THE EMBERS OF CIVIL STRIFE. MEANWHILE, KARAME IS ACTIVE ATTEMPTING TO SHORE UP HIS TRIPARTITE ALLIANCE BY CONSULTING WITH RAYMOND EDDE WHO EXPRESSED CRITICISM OF THE PRIMIN FOR "WASTING TIME" WITH THE DIALOGUE COMMITTEE. ONLY TIME WILL TELL WHETHER THE NEW DYNAMISM ON THE POLITICAL FRONT CONSTITUTES MEASUREABLE PROGRESS OR THE POLITICOS OF LEBANON ARE TRYING TO MAKE A DOLLOR OUT OF FIFTEEN CENTS.

7. ECONOMIC ACTIVITY HAS PICKED UP MOST BANKS ARE OPEN FOR AT LEAST SOME TRANSACTIONS, AND THE INTER-BANK EXCHANGE RATE HAS REMAINED AT LL 2.38 TO THE DOLLAR (BUYING) AND 2.40 (SELLING). PORT DIRECTOR ESTIMATES ACTIVITY 30-40 PERCENT OF NORMAL LEVEL WITH ABOUT 20 SHIPS IN HARBOR OR JUST OUTSIDE WAITING TO BE UNLOADED. AT END OF LAST WEEK POLICE FORCED SOUK VENDORS TO MOVE THEIR STALLS FROM HAMRA TO SANAYE (PUBLIC GARDENS SEVEN BLOCKS TO THE EAST), AND OVER WEEKEND MOST OF HAMRA'S FASHIONABLE SHOPS REOPENED.

8. PRIMIN KARAMI AT SATURDAY CABINET MEETING PRESENTED PROPOSALS TO RELAUNCH THE ECONOMY AND LIMIT UNEMPLOYMENT. HE PROPOSED THE TRANSFORMATION OF THE DEVELOPMENT BANK INTO A COMMERCIAL BANK, A GOVT GUARANTEE OF INVESTMENT IN COMMERCE AND INDUSTRY MUCH AS IT NOW GUARANTEES BANK DEPOSITS, THE ESTABLISHMENT OF AN OFFICE WHICH WOULD BE PART OF THE SERAIL TO COORDINATE FOREIGN OFFERS OF ASSISTANCE, THE CONSTRUCTION OF ADDITIONAL OIL REFINERY CAPACITY AND A DRY DOCK, THE CREATION OF A PETRO-CHEMICAL INDUSTRY, INITIATION OF PUBLIC HOUSING PROJECTS, AND THE SETTING UP OF AN INDEMNITY PROGRAM FOR PEOPLE AND BUSINESSES WHICH HAVE SUSTAINED DAMAGE.

9. AT SPECIAL MEETING TODAY THE CABINET MET WITH REPS OF THE CENTRAL BANK, THE DEVELOPMENT BANK AND THE BANKERS' ASSOCIATION AND INVITED THEM TO PREPARE STUDIES AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THE CABINET'S CONSIDERATION. THE NEXT SESSION WILL TAKE
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PAGE 05 BEIRUT 14292 171710Z

PLACE ON WEDNESDAY.
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Message Attributes

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